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Church being rebuilt by Lowndes men

By Carl M. White, pastor
Highland Church, Meridian

Outside Raymond, a group of men from Lowndes County are rebuilding Palestine Church. They are not paid contractors; they are volunteers helping a sister church in time of need.

When Palestine Church burned on January 17 from a fire caused by an electrical short, help came from several sources, according to pastor Jerry File.

The first assistance came in the form of a place to meet. For three months the church met in the Wright and Ferguson Funeral Chapel in Raymond.

"They were very gracious to us in a time of need," File said.

The second assistance came when the church was able to secure a mobile chapel from the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB).

The mobile chapel program is a ministry provided by the MBCB Strategic Initiatives Department through the Margaret Lackey State Missions Offering.

However, all this was temporary and with the insurance settlement insufficient to replace the lost building, File sought help through the MBCB Men's Ministry Department.

The Men's Ministry Department put together the need of Palestine Church with the ability of a group of Baptist men from Lowndes County churches, and as a result Palestine Church is being rebuilt and actually gaining

additional space for worship and education.

"This all came together in about six weeks," File said.

Don Harding, bivocational pastor of Kolola Springs

"Those of us who couldn't go for a week got together and organized this short-term team."

Now, 36 men from four Lowndes Association churches

tuaries, fellowship halls, and such. One time we helped build a dormitory.

"Some of the men on this team plan their vacation days each year in order to be a part of this ministry," Harding pointed out.

The ministry is the main focus of the Kolola Springs Church Brotherhood. They even designate two percent of their receipts to support the team's ministry.

According to John Henry, secretary for Baptist Construction Fellowship and director of missions for George Association in Lucedale, this team provides an invaluable service to churches like Palestine. The savings in construction costs has allowed the church to not only replace the lost building, but also expand.

"We need more men to be part of building teams for this kind of work."

"We have needs all the time in the Men's Ministry program for this kind of mission work. It doesn't have to be a church group. Individual men who would like to work on a project like this can just contact the Men's Ministry Department."

We need men for construction at Central Hills Assembly as well as for World Changers each summer," Henry said.

For more information on the construction fellowship, and other Men's Ministry programs, contact Jim Didlake, at P. O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. Telephone (601) 292-3335, or toll-free outside Jackson (800) 748-1652, ext. 335. Email jdidlake@mbcb.org.



RAISING A WALL — Helping with construction at Palestine Church in Hinds County are (from left): Jerry File, pastor, Palestine Church; Jeff Brown, Kolola Springs Church, Caledonia; Don Harding, pastor, Kolola Springs Church, Caledonia; Ray Chandler, Caledonia Church; David Gaddy, New Salem Church, Caledonia; Jimmy Smith, pastor, Community Church, Columbus; Bob Chandler; project coordinator, Palestine Church. (Photo by Carl M. White)

Church, Caledonia, said men from his church and from New Salem Church, Community Church, and Caladonia Church formed a framing team to respond to the needs of Palestine Church.

Harding is also principal of Caledonia High School.

"Ten years ago, we had some men going on week-long mission and construction trips," Harding said.

are available to respond to construction needs for a Wednesday through Sunday effort. Most of their projects these past nine years have been within a day's drive of Lowndes County.

"These men pay their own expenses, including hotel room, breakfast, and supper. The church provides their noon meal," File said.

"We have built church sanc-

U.S. high court strikes down pre-game prayers

WASHINGTON (BP) — A Texas school district policy permitting public prayer before football games is unconstitutional, even when the prayer is composed and led by a student, the U.S. Supreme Court announced June 19. The opinion elicited concern and criticism from Christian leaders and religious liberty organizations.

In a 6-3 decision, the high court ruled against a policy in a Galveston County school district that permitted the high school student body to determine if it wanted a student to speak over the public address system before football games. If so, the students elected the speaker, who determined whether he would pray or give some other message.

Such prayers delivered with the approval of the Santa Fe Independent

School District violate the First Amendment's prohibition against government establishment of religion, the court said in its opinion.

"The delivery of such a message — over the school's public-address system, by a speaker representing the student body, under the supervision of school faculty and pursuant to a school policy that explicitly and implicitly encourages public prayer — is not properly characterized as 'private' speech," Associate Justice John Paul Stevens wrote in the majority opinion.

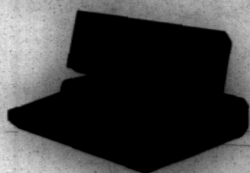
Chief Justice William Rehnquist, however, sharply criticized the decision, calling it unfaithful to the establishment clause in both its ruling and tone. The majority "distorts existing precedent" to reach its con-

clusion, which "bristles with hostility to all things religious in public life," Rehnquist wrote in his dissenting opinion.

The high court's ruling, which upheld one in the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, relied upon another one of its controversial church-state decisions, a 1992 opinion striking down a school administration-organized, clergy-led prayer at a graduation ceremony. That case, *Lee v. Weisman*, involved the prayer of a Jewish rabbi at a middle school graduation.

"Regardless of the listener's support for, or objection to, the message, an objective Santa Fe High School student will unquestionably perceive the inevitable pregame prayer as stamped with her school's seal of approval," wrote Justice John Paul Stevens.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK



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No place for religion?

There was a time in America when religion in public life was not such a fearful activity that the people had to be protected from exposure to it. There was a time when public mention of God's providence and a plea for his continued blessings was not considered a verbal assault.

That time began as the Founders' ink was drying on the U.S. Constitution more than two centuries ago, and has been an integral part of civic life for most of the history of the Republic. There are many examples.

Every session of the U.S. Congress and the Mississippi Legislature open with a public prayer, and every president places his hand on a Bible to take his oath of office in a ceremony that includes public prayer.

Who can forget President Franklin Roosevelt's fervent prayer on behalf of the nation as he sent young Americans to storm the fortified beaches of Normandy?

Yet there are those people who believe religion has no place in our enlightened culture, so much so that they have spent the better part of the last 40 years attempting to stamp out the role of religion in public life.

On June 19, the U.S. Supreme Court gave those people a boost when the justices ruled, in a 6-3 decision in the case of *Sante Fe (Texas)*

Independent School District v. Doe, that a representative elected by students could not offer a voluntary "statement" over the public address system before football games.

Granted, the issues in this case are not as clear as redacted news accounts would lead a reasonable person to conclude. According to published reports, the school district in the past has engaged in rather flagrant promotion of one religion and even a denomination within that religion.

Since the school district is in Texas, one could probably deduce the religion and even the denomination being promoted, but it doesn't really matter. If the shoe were on the other foot, Christian parents surely wouldn't want their children subjected to a

mandatory, school-sponsored Hindu ceremony, Buddhist prayer, or Rastafarian marijuana-smoking session before a high school football game.

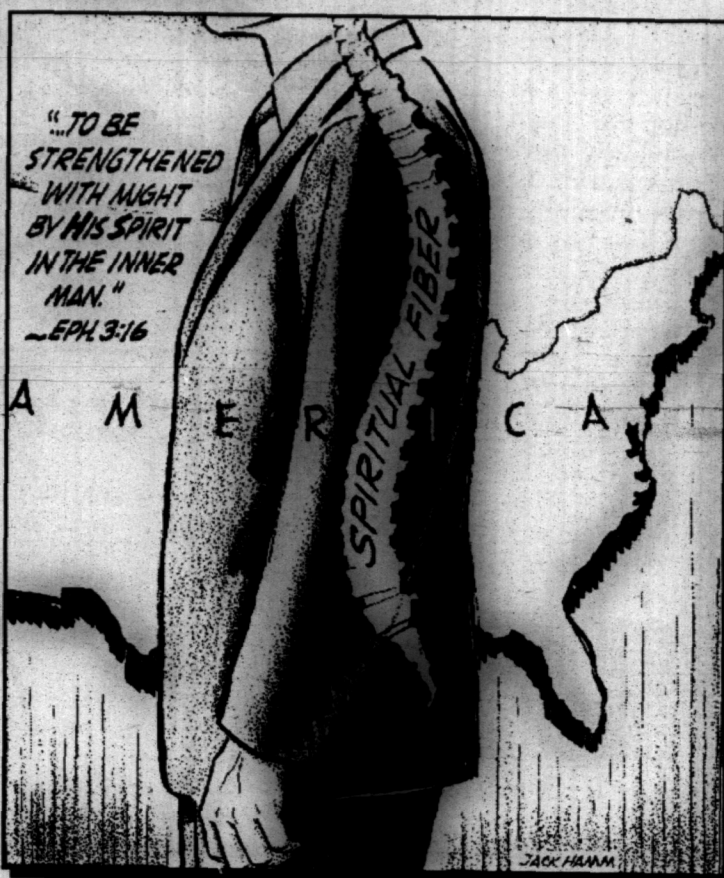
As non-Christian religions continue to grow steadily in numbers and influence in the U.S., such a turn of events is no longer such an outlandish proposition.

That's what the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution is all about — no one should be pressured or coerced into participating in a state-endorsed, majoritarian religion.

Baptists have given their lives over the centuries for that concept, and it's no mistake the Founders made it the very first amendment in the Bill of Rights.

Rulings of the U.S. Supreme Court in recent years, however, have had a troubling tendency to make these cases a test not of freedom of religion but of freedom from religion. That's a far cry from the Founders' intent, as evidenced by their own writings and practices.

It seems the nation's highest court is bent on removing religion in any form from the public square, resulting in a perfectly secular culture where all religious practices will be a curiosity carried on quite apart from



No BR on July 6

Due to postal regulations limiting publication of *The Baptist Record* to 50 issues per year, there will be no issue on Thursday, July 6. All news items requested to appear in the July 13 issue must be received by July 6. Churches which plan to use the "special page" feature on July 13 must ensure those items arrive at Cain Lithographers no later than noon on Tuesday, July 11.

GUEST OPINION:



One life can make a difference

By Don Wilson, director
Strategic Initiatives Department, MBCB

Fisher identified so much with the new Hispanic Christians that they named him "Diego." He helped them find housing and even translated in a hospital delivery room during childbirth. He completely gave his life to reaching Hispanics for Christ.

Within two years, 100 people accepted Jesus through the efforts of Fisher and the Capilla Bautista El Buen Pastor (Church of the Good Shepherd), and the church con-

tinues to minister to the growing Hispanic community.

One of the church members originally from Puerto Rico, Joel Medina, now pastors two Hispanic new church starts in Kosciusko and Leake County. He is presently working with First Church, Louisville, to begin a Hispanic ministry in that area.

Another member of the Capilla Bautista El Buen Pastor, Eduardo Esquerra, serves as a translator for Mississippi Baptist partnership mis-



sions projects and uses his skills in the chicken industry to help in a separate Bolivian mission effort.

Fisher died in an automobile accident in May 1999 at the age of 23. He had two funerals — one in English at his home church and one in Spanish at the Hispanic mission.

The lost are being reached for Christ all over Mississippi because of people just like Wade Fisher, and because of the resources Mississippi Baptists provide through the State Missions Offering.

This year's State Mission Offering theme is, "On Behalf of the Land — Stand in the Gap." Will your church be one that stands in the gap? Will you reach out in love and minister to the lost and dying in our state?

Will you support with prayers and finances the many ministries supported by the State Missions Offering that are making a real difference?

For more information on the State Missions Offering, contact Mississippi Woman's Missionary Union at P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. Telephone: (601) 292-3316 or toll free outside Jackson (800) 748-1651, ext. 316. E-mail: adungan@mbcb.org.

'The Trail' offers witnessing opportunities

ORLANDO, Fla. — The two young women might have been friends who had known each other for years. They smiled frequently during an animated conversation as music pounded from the nightclub's sound system — but Shelley, 22, and Kenny, 21, had just met.

Shelley Henwood, a University of Florida senior, was with a group of volunteers who went into an Orlando strip club June 9 to share the love of Christ. Kenny, an 11th grade dropout, is a dancer in the club.

Lynn Latham, director of church-community ministries for the Greater Orlando Baptist Association, organized the

"ladies of the night" outreach as part of Crossover Orlando, the annual evangelism blitz on the weekend before the Southern Baptist Convention meeting.

The effort focused on Orange Blossom Trail — a stretch of U.S. Highway 441 known for prostitution, drug sales, and pornographic businesses. Latham, a 22-year home missionary, has ministered along "The Trail" for the past four years.

Manuel Galindo, a probation officer from Harlingen, Texas, accompanied the volunteers into the club and handed each of them a few of the new Sacajawea dollar coins. Their

instructions were to give the coins to the dancers and waitresses, and to explain the significance of the gift.

"The woman on the coin represents your power as a woman. The eagle on the other side means you can soar like an eagle, and the coin's gold color is a reminder — to God, you are more precious than gold."

Galindo, a bivocational pastor and former North American Mission Board trustee, has worked with Latham to develop the ministry to employees of strip clubs. "I look at them as individuals that were created in God's image," he said, "and if Jesus came and died for them, it's the least I can do."

Woman's Missionary Union groups in Florida churches supported the effort by assembling gift bags of personal care items for female employees of strip clubs. Volunteers distributed 200 bags during the "ladies of the night" emphasis.

"These women need to see love," Latham explained.

Volunteer Jacqui Ligas of Naples, Fla., described the reception the volunteers got in one club. "I was shocked. They were just so happy for us to be there. They were hugging our necks and thanking us." The club manager invited the volunteers to return the next day.

One key to the ministry is to have as many prayer partners outside a club as volunteers who go inside. Latham said she has tried going in without the prayer support and found there was no power in the witnessing efforts.

Volunteer Pam Tate of Lakeland, Fla., admitted that before talking with the dancers, she had a prejudice against strippers and prostitutes.

"Tonight it helped me to see. Who am I to judge?" she asked.

Tate returned to the area the following day and went into a different strip club.

She and volunteer Dot Spear of Plant City, Fla., talked with a dancer whose husband had walked out, leaving her with three children and a mortgage.

Though the woman is an LPN (licensed practical nurse), she earns more money as a

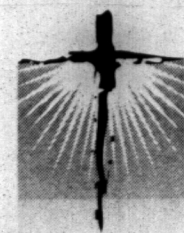
dancer. Tate commented, "If that doesn't touch your heart, to hear some of these girls say, 'No, we don't like what we're doing, but we've got to make a living.'"

Spear had a similar reaction. "It made me feel a love for someone that before I might have been a little bit afraid of or disgusted with."

She added, "My oldest daughter is an LPN."

College student Henwood said she was glad for the opportunity to witness and to show care and love to Kenny and the other women working in the strip club, though it was disconcerting to see them resume dancing after a conversation.

"Maybe they'll go home tonight and think about it," Henwood said.



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THE
SECOND
FRONT PAGE

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PRAYER AT WORK — Charles Best (foreground), Southside Church, Apopka, Fla., and Dot Spear (center), First Church, Plant City, Fla., pray for a ministry team at work June 9 inside Cabaret Gentleman's Club on Orlando's Orange Blossom Trail, a stretch of highway dominated by adult entertainment. The ministry, called Ladies of the Night, reaches out to women working in the adult entertainment industry. Sponsored by the Greater Orlando Baptist Association, the Orange Blossom Trail ministry was one of many events making up Crossover 2000. A Crossover evangelistic effort is held annually in the host city of the Southern Baptist Convention. (Photo by Bob Carey)

Evolution disclaimer falls

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP) — Decrying that the Supreme Court has allowed a federal appeals court to further promote "the secular legend" of the Scopes Monkey Trial, Associate Justice Antonin Scalia criticized the high court's June 19 rejection of an appeal by a Louisiana school board over its policy requiring teachers to read a disclaimer before teaching evolution to their students.

By a 6-3 vote, the Supreme Court decided not to review the appeal by the Tangipahoa Parish Board of Education concerning its 1994 policy requiring public school teachers to tell their students the lesson on the "scientific theory of evolution ... was not intended to influence or dissuade the Biblical version of creation." Several parents of children in the school district sued, arguing that the disclaimer violated the so-called "wall of separation" between church and state.

A federal judge struck down the policy, a ruling that was subsequently upheld by a U.S. appeals court. The federal judge said the disclaimer was unconstitutional because it had a religious purpose. But the U.S. appeals court struck it down for a different reason, declaring that it had the effect of promoting religion. In its most recent ruling on evolution in the schools, the Supreme Court in 1987 struck down a Louisiana law requiring equal treatment to creationism and evolution.

The six Supreme Court justices who rejected the Tangipahoa appeal June 19 did so without comment. Their action was not precedent-setting and was only a denial of review. Chief Justice William Rehnquist and Justices Clarence Thomas and Antonin Scalia dissented, with Scalia offering scathing criticism of the court's decision.



Looking back

10 years ago

In an unprecedented development, 12 of 14 resolutions reported by the resolution committee at the annual SBC in New Orleans, die for a lack of a quorum at the final session. With over 35,000 registered, 9,600 messengers (25%) were needed to conduct business, but only 4,000-5,000 were present.

20 years ago

Marjean Patterson, executive director of the Mississippi Woman's Missionary Union, announces that when the books were closed the end of May, Mississippi Baptists had given a record \$2.5 million to the Lottie Moon Offering. The 1979 national goal of \$40.5 million was also exceeded.

50 years ago

First Church, Jackson, receives the keys to First Christian Church, which it previously purchased when the Christian Church completed a move to its new plant. First Church has also authorized a fund-raising campaign for an expansion of its new facilities.

FINDING THE LOST — Pamela Tate (left), Great Commission Church, Lakeland, Fla., and Dot Spear, First Church, Plant City, Fla., exit the Dollhouse Gentleman's Club on Orlando's Orange Blossom Trail, a stretch of highway dominated by adult entertainment. They gave club dancers gold Sacajawea dollars as a symbol of hope as well as gift bags of personal items. (Photo by Bob Carey)

Lyles: Christ-like compassion needed today

ORLANDO, Fla. (BP) — A Christ-like compassion for the people who are like sheep without a shepherd was urged by the president of the African American Fellowship of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in a June 11 luncheon.

Joseph W. Lyles of Fort Washington, Md., declared that to be effective witnesses Christians must be willing to "travel through the storm" as the disciples did with Jesus to get "to the other side."

Pastors must provide for their own spiritual renewal to be adequately prepared for the challenges inherent to preaching the gospel, said Lyles, addressing more than 100 fellowship members and supporters at the Omni Rosen Hotel in Orlando, Fla.

Lyles said pastors must provide for their own spiritual renewal to be adequately prepared for the challenges inherent to preaching the gospel. "Even Jesus took time away from his disciples," he observed.

When church leaders lose their compassion and ability to deal with "the common man and his struggles," Lyles warned, "instead of a warm doxology, we end up with a cold theology."

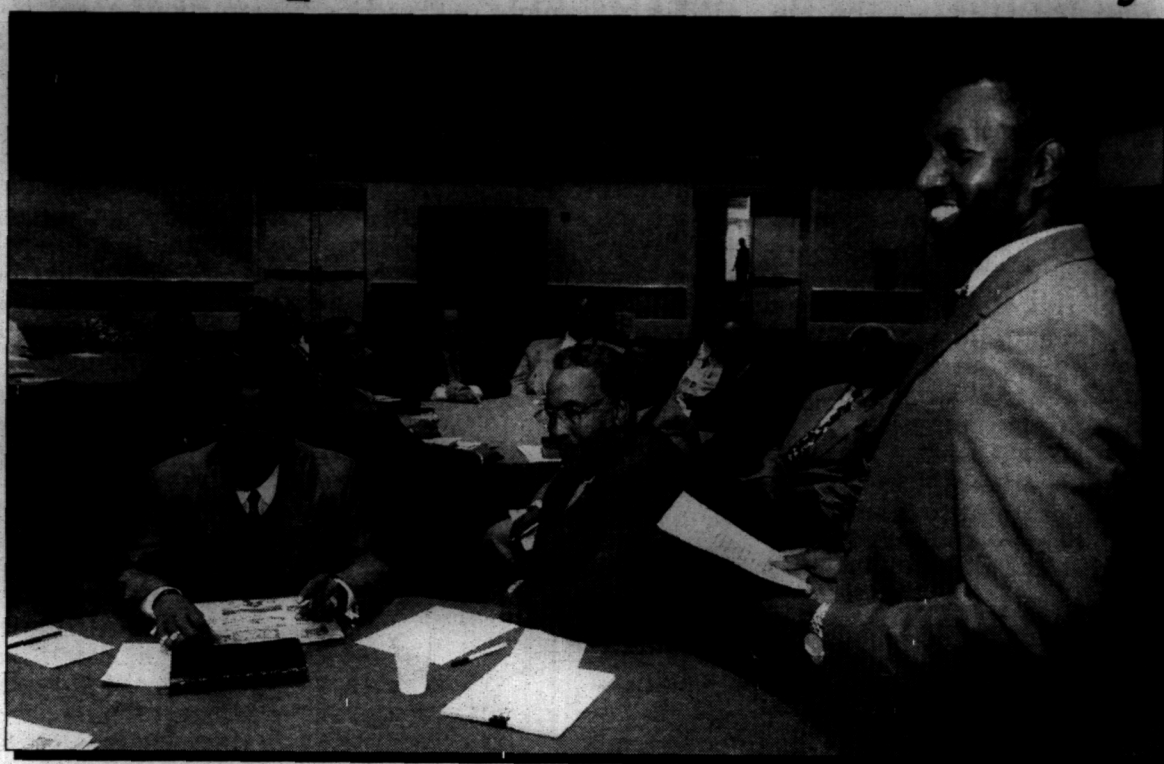
Lyles also expressed concern for churches having "church administration, but no spiritual inspiration."

Throughout his message, Lyles emphasized the need for compassion from church leaders and within church ministries while expressing the need from strong pastoral leadership.

Lyles challenged the fellowship to do what is necessary so they and their churches may "reap his harvest."

Prior to the presidential address, several denominational representatives brought greetings and presented awards on behalf of their respective agencies.

Leroy Fountain of the Annuity Board outlined services and benefits available to pastors and other church employees through the Dallas-based SBC agency. Elgia Wells, black church development consultant at LifeWay Christian Resources, presented the Black Church Development Christian Education award to Houston



FELLOWSHIP MEETS — Joseph W. Lyles (right) opens the annual meeting of the African American Fellowship of the Southern Baptist Convention, held June 12 in Orlando's Omni Rosen Hotel. (Photo by Bill Bangham)

pastor Ameal Jones and Mount Ararat Church. Jim Culp of the Baptist General Convention of Texas accepted the award on Jones' behalf.

Fellowship members applauded as George McCalep, pastor of Greenforest Community Church, Decatur, Ga., announced an agreement with LifeWay Christian Stores to increase their inventory of African American titles by carrying books produced by his publishing company, Orman Press.

Three awards were presented by Robert Wilson, manager of the African American church planting unit of the North American Mission Board.

The Victor T. Glass Award, given annually for contributions made by Southern Baptists toward racial reconciliation, was presented to Daniel Page for his reconcil-

ing work in North Carolina, Virginia, and South Carolina, as well as for contributions he has made since his retirement from full-time denominational work.

Acknowledging a changed focus within the North American Mission Board from cooperative ministries to planting indigenous African American churches, Wilson then presented the Church Planter Award to W. Charles Howard, who has planted more than 17 churches in the state of Florida.

Rochelle Davis, pastor of Temple of Faith Church, Detroit, Mich., was presented a church sponsor award "for outstanding leadership in sponsoring congregations."

During his 32-year tenure at Temple of Faith, Davis has led his congregation to sponsor five church starts.

MBMC opens new on-line registration

Patients scheduling a stay at Mississippi Baptist Medical Center (MBMC) in Jackson can now utilize the Internet to take care of much of the registration process, according to Rick Caldwell, MBMC chief information officer.

Online pre-registration is available for inpatient or outpatient procedures. On MBMC's home page (www.mbhs.org), users can click the item at left entitled, "online pre-registration." Caldwell noted that submitted information is highly secure in accordance with federal and state guidelines.

MBMC's use of new information technologies led to the medical center's recent designation as one of the nation's 100 Most Wired Hospitals by Hospitals and Health Networks magazine.

For more information regarding online pre-registration, visit the web site or call MBMC at (800) 948-6262.

Missionary recognized with '00 Simmons Award

ORLANDO, Fla. (BP) — For the first time, a career missionary was named recipient of the award given annually by the African American church relations component of the Southern Baptist International Mission Board.

The 2000 Simmons Award was given to Isaac Durosinsesu Ayanrinola for his mission work and his contributions in raising missions awareness among Africans and African Americans.

The award is named in honor of Willie Simmons, the first African American employed by the Foreign Mission Board (now IMB) to promote missions awareness and involvement among black Southern Baptist churches.

Ayanrinola received the award at the annual luncheon of the African American Fellowship of the Southern Baptist Convention June 12 at the Omni Rosen Hotel in Orlando, Fla.

Born and raised in western Nigeria, Ayanrinola attended Baptist schools in the region and eventually

accepted Christ as his Lord and Savior. Sensing a call to full-time Christian ministry,

Ayanrinola enrolled in a Baptist seminary and later became a pastor in Lagos, Nigeria. After

a time in pastoral ministry, he accepted a call to the mission field and served as an appointed missionary of the Nigerian Baptist Convention for eight years in the West African country of Sierra Leone.

A resident of the United States for the past eight years, Ayanrinola recently earned a doctor of missiology degree from Southern Seminary, Louisville, Ky.

In presenting the award, David Cornelius of IMB lauded Ayanrinola for his "invaluable" assistance in missions involvement among African Americans. Cornelius, a former career missionary, now serves as IMB director of African American church relations.

In accepting the award, Ayanrinola lamented the fact that out of the 150 years that Southern Baptist missionaries have been appointed to Nigeria there have only been three African Americans — Sue Thompson, Cornelius and his wife, Elwanda.

"What are you waiting for?" Ayanrinola challenged luncheon attendees.



SIMMONS AWARD RECIPIENT — Issac Durosinsesu Ayanrinola (left) addresses the annual meeting of the African American Fellowship of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) June 12 after receiving the International Mission Board's Willy Simmons Award for his efforts in black church relations. Ayanrinola, originally from Nigeria, became a Christian through the witness of two SBC missionaries in his home country. One of those missionaries, David Cornelius, stands behind him during the presentation in Orlando's Omni Rosen Hotel. (Photo by Bill Bangham)

Baptist congressman keeping faith in D.C.

WASHINGTON (BP) — Ever know a politician who not only did not mind losing but seemed actually to thrive on it? If not, meet Tom Coburn.

It probably is a misnomer even to call the congressman from northeastern Oklahoma a politician.

He pledged when he was first elected in 1994 to spend no more than three terms in the House of Representatives. He declined his government pension and health-care benefits. As a Republican, he has frequently exasperated his party's leaders, especially in his resolve to reduce federal spending.

His outspoken convictions on moral issues have not ingratiated him with liberals. He infuriated moderate and liberal House members of his own party earlier this year when he campaigned on behalf of a conservative challenger to a congresswoman in a GOP primary.

He has continued to practice medicine weekly in Muskogee, Okla., throughout more than five years in Congress.

If the things you believe in are "really [grounded] in biblical principles, it's OK to stand up for them and lose," Coburn, a Southern Baptist, says in an interview in his office on Capitol Hill. "I don't win a

whole lot of victories up here, but I don't back down from any fight if it's based on something that I believe is right.

"The real thing I've learned is losing is a way of serving ... [Christians] have already won. We don't have to have a victory."

Coburn's time in Congress has reinforced for him "that self-esteem comes mainly from the Lord." When you know "the price was paid for you, even though you're fallen and you fail every day, [and] that you have tremendous value ... that's enough security. I don't have to have security from winning."

The willingness to lose on principle was one of the reasons Coburn ran for Congress in the first place, he says.

"I believe that it's OK to stand up for what you believe in, even if some other people don't like it," he says. "[W]hen you do that, it builds trust, and one of the things that we're lacking today in our country is confidence and trust in our leadership."

Another reason he decided to seek a congressional seat is based on his belief "people besides career politicians ought to be in Washington," the Muskogee maverick says.

With two exceptions for House votes, Coburn has returned to Muskogee every

weekend he has been in Congress. When he is home, he not only spends time with his wife, Carolyn, and their family, which includes three grown daughters and two grandchildren, and attends New Community Church in Muskogee, but he sees patients and does congressional work in the district.

Every fourth weekend he is the doctor on call for the practice.

The weekend prior to this interview, Coburn delivered five babies, three to unmarried teenagers.

Last year, he delivered about 100 children.

While his losses in Congress have been numerous, it appears Coburn will leave Washington at the end of this session with a decisive personal win.

"My greatest victory is the closer walk [with Christ] that I have now than what I had when I came up here," he says.



Coburn

PRAYER POLICE

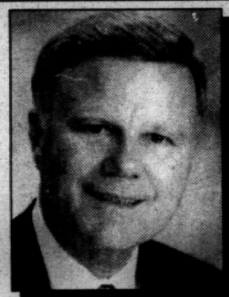
Last week the Supreme Court of the United States of America outlawed student-led prayer before football games. Years ago they had already driven prayers from the schools, and now prayers are removed from the football stadiums. I can remember Friday night football games opening with prayer and the National Anthem. Those things are to be memories and for future generations, only historic footnotes.

There is something strange about the way we go about making laws and interpreting right and wrong actions. The court rules that flag burning is okay for it is an expression of freedom of speech, but prayer is outlawed as an infringement on the rights of minorities. The court says that abortion is permissible, yet now prayer cannot be permitted.

As I think about those pre-game prayers of yesteryear, I'm really not sure how effective they were. If they were intended to keep players from being injured, I'm afraid they were not especially effective. If their purpose was to help us win, they definitely were not always heard. However, it may be that the real purpose of the prayer moment was to acknowledge that God has a place and is a significant part of every facet of life, whether it is Friday night football or Sunday morning worship.

Although I disagreed with the ruling of the court last week, let me take this opportunity to point out some positive things for each of us to keep in mind:

• **Celebration.** "Celebrate?" you ask. Absolutely! For the truth is, it is impossible to stop praying people. Yes, public prayer may be diminished and public prayer does have an important place. Jesus prayed publicly when he blessed the five loaves and two fishes and significant things happened. He



Directions

Jim Futral, executive director-treasurer
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

prayed publicly before he called forth Lazarus from the tomb.

At the same time, our God is not restricted to public pronouncements. When you study Jesus' instructions about prayer, he pointed out that we should be careful about public prayer for it can be subject to hypocrisy and self-glorification.

He then pointed us to private praying, in a secret closet, out of

which would come public transformation.

• **Reaffirmation.** Prayer does make a difference! When Jesus was speaking about prayer in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7:7), he told us, "Ask and it shall be given unto you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you." Prayer is a force connected to Heaven.

A friend once told me that his

Successful management



Gary Aylor of LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville, recently led a session on Successful Christian Money Management at the Baptist Building in Jackson. There were 40 directors of missions and pastors trained as seminar leaders. Jerry Mixon, director, of the Stewardship Department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, said the aim of the training is to assist individual church members in developing a personal and family money management system. For more information, contact Mixon at P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. Telephone (601) 292-3348 or toll-free outside Jackson (800) 748-1651, ext. 348. E-mail: jmixon@mbcb.org

father taught him, "Prayer is work; prayer works; and prayer will put you to work." Rather than us focusing on whatever action the Supreme Court may have taken, why don't we reaffirm our confidence in the glorious possibilities that we can experience in prayer?

• **Evaluation.** All of us need to evaluate our personal prayer lives. We complain that pre-game prayer has been taken away from football games, while ignoring the practice of daily, personal prayer contact with God.

The actions taken last week were the actions of the Supreme Court of the United States of America. There is a court of higher appeal. God calls us into his very presence through the avenue of prayer and we so often neglect it.

We are instructed in God's Word to pray for our leaders. I think I would be safe in saying that most of us will complain about the Supreme Court ruling, even ridicule and criticize the court, yet spend little or no time asking God to intervene in the lives of those people in those positions.

I am certainly not a constitutional lawyer, but it appears to me that the court is guilty of applying different standards on different issues. On one hand, they say that the moral standards and mores of a community determine what is obscene.

On the other hand, the standards of the community, related to prayer, are ignored.

Bodies of law and the courts have never been particularly supportive of preaching or praying. In Acts 4:18, the disciples were commanded, "not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus" — but then, verse 31 says, "and when they had prayed, the place was shaken."

The God who shook the world then, can shake it again! Let's pray.

Corrections

On page ten of the issue of June 22, new Southern Baptist Convention President James Merritt was incorrectly identified as the former pastor of First Church, Laurel. He is actually the former pastor of Highland Church, Laurel.

On page ten of the issue of June 8, Gerry Rainey was incorrectly identified as the pastor of Mt. Moriah Church, Ripley.

The Baptist Record regrets the errors.



Note burning at Gulf Coast Association, Gulfport

Revival dates

Friendship, McComb: July 9-12; homecoming, July 9; Sunday, 11 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.; Mon. and Tues., 7 p.m.; Wed., 11 a.m. and 7 p.m.; Bill Webb, Meridian, evangelist; Hubert Greer, Wesson, music; LaVerne Summerlin, pastor.

Oak Grove, Phoenix: July 9-12; Sunday, 11 a.m., noon meal, afternoon service; Mon.-Wed., 7:30 p.m.; Thomas Peoples, Wisner, La., evangelist; Darby Combs, pastor.

Gulf Coast Association, Gulfport, burned the note on its new facility on May 22. The one year old facility is a 7,200 square foot multipurpose building housing the association's office, a counseling center, and a conference center. Pictured (from left) are Charlie Delk, chairman of the training center planning committee; George Holifield, chairman of the construction committee; Don Ball, chairman of the association finance committee; Ed Holmes, present moderator; and Bobby Perry, director of missions.

God's Awesome Powers will be held at First Church, Pearl, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., Saturday, July 8. Lunch will be provided. For more information, call (601) 939-4476.



Parkway Church, Houston, broke ground June 4 for an educational annex. This facility will contain a new nursery and preschool department. The current nursery and the church's first educational unit will be renovated. This is phase one of a two-phase building project. Phase two will include a Family Life Center and conversion of the fellowship hall into an educational building. Pictured (from left) are Gregg Thomas, pastor; Frank Thomas, chairman; Brenda King; Janet Johnson; Ronnie Fisackerly, and Stoney Taylor, members of the building committee. Not pictured is Sherry Griffin.

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A Gospel Singing will be held at Providence Church, Grenada County, July 9 at 6 p.m. Don Montgomery is music director. Harvey Springer is pastor.

Grandview Church, Pearl, will celebrate its 40th anniversary on July 9. Sunday School will begin at 9:30 a.m. and worship at 10:30 a.m., followed by lunch. Afternoon service of special music and fellowship begins at 1 p.m.

Bay Vista Church, Biloxi, will observe dedication services on July 2 for its newly completed worship facility. Dedication services will follow a covered dish fellowship lunch at noon. The guest speaker will be Allen H. Stephens, who served as the fifth

pastor of the church, 1970-1977. The church (formerly organized on Oct. 8, 1961 with 175 charter members), began in 1960 as a mission, sponsored by Pass Road Church, Gulfport. Sunday schedule now is Bible Study at 9:15 a.m. and worship at 10:30 a.m. The 8:30 a.m. service has been discontinued. Jerry N. Watts is pastor. Call (228) 388-1166 for additional information.



GAs of Oak Grove Church, Lauderdale Association

Oak Grove Church, Lauderdale Association, held a GA Recognition Service on May 14. Each GA participant received her World Venture Charm and a Bible, then shared some of her experiences while in GAs. Pictured are (back row, from left) Kacee Mott and Chris Sims; (front row) April Roberson and Hannah Rice. Harold Scott is pastor.



First Church, Vancleave, held ground breaking services for its new multipurpose building on Sunday, May 28. Members of the committee (pictured from left) are Conrad Mallette, Doug Shore, Brenda Tootle, Carolyn Boyd, Melva Ely, Vicky McKee, Larry Simpson, Lucretia Howell, Sharon Buchanan, and Quint Moran.

Mississippi Baptist Youth Night

Mississippi Coliseum,
Jackson

Friday, July 14

6:30 - 9:00 p.m.

(One session only)



Greg Matte
Speaker

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BRING YOUR YOUTH

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Chris Tomlin
Worship Leader

worship now



Services at Mt. Vernon Church, Eupora



Baptist Health Systems' School of Radiography has announced its 2000 graduating class. The class includes (from left) Brandy Hill of Brandon, Paula Stogner of Brandon, Serena Hays of Madison, Sandy Sebrén of Mendenhall, Bari Lynn Ellis of Vicksburg, Brandy Richardson of Richland, Martha Cleveland of Florence, Tanya Sellars of Jackson, Amy Hollingsworth of Clinton, Jennifer Peritt of Morton, and Nanci Scales of Brandon.

Holcomb Church, Holcomb, has called **Jason Abernathy** as minister of youth. He previously served at First Church, Greenwood.



Abernathy

Clarksdale Church, Clarksdale, has called **Edd Lawrence** as pastor effective June 1. A native of Florence, Ala., Lawrence previously served at

Peach Creek Church, Como. He received his education at the University of North Alabama and Mid-America Seminary.

Broadmoor Church, Madison, has recently called several new staff members.

Jim Parks is serving as minister of music and worship. He previously served at Florida Boulevard Church, Baton Rouge, La. Parks received his education at Southwestern Seminary.

Pam Burdette is serving as minister to preschoolers. She previously served at North

Mt. Vernon Church, Eupora, celebrated its sesquicentennial anniversary in conjunction with its annual memorial homecoming services on May 21. Pictured (from left) are James Bryant, director of mis-

sions for Webster County, presenting an anniversary certificate from the Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission to Dale Strickland, pastor; Luther Sykes, deacon; and Russell Hood, deacon.



The Laws and Sewell

Pine Grove Church in Dumas, Benton-Tippah Association, recently awarded **Brittany Law** with a pin for 13 years of perfect attendance in Sunday School. Pictured with

Brittany are her parents, Roman and Angela Doty, her sister, Demi, and her pastor, Harvey Sewell.

Euclatubba Church, Saltillo, held deacon ordination service, May 7, for Brian Grammer and Glen Williams. Pictured (from left) are Scott Witcher, pastor; Grammer; Williams; and John Hearn, who delivered the charge to the candidates.



Ordination service at Euclatubba Church, Saltillo

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Evening Sessions

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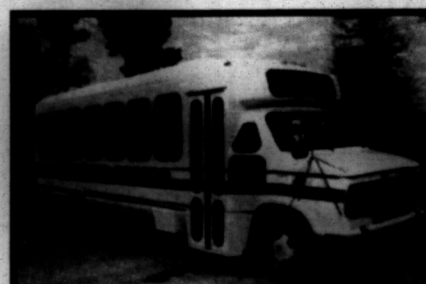
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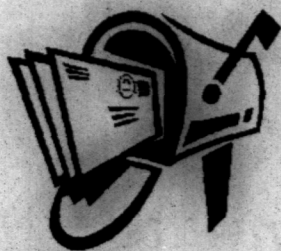
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WCC hosts Creative Scholars camp

William Carey College Center for Creative Scholars will present the ninth annual Creativity Exploration for 2nd through 6th graders July 24-26, and for 7th through 12th graders July 25-27 from 9 a.m. until 3:30 p.m. on the Hattiesburg campus. Students should exhibit a myriad of creative, intellectual, leadership, and artistic qualities including flexibility of thought, use of advanced vocabulary, can express self well, and thinks about art as a way of communicating. Students must be nominated by a parent or teacher for the program. For information about registration and additional information call Read Diket at (601) 582-6205 or write The Center for Creative Scholars at 498 Tuscan Ave. Box 148, Hattiesburg, MS 39401.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Unsigned letters will not be printed. No multi-copy or form letters will be used.

Each correspondent must include an address and telephone number for verification. In special instances, name may be withheld at writer's request and editor's discretion.

Please include the name of cooperating Mississippi Baptist church where correspondent is a member. (Mississippi Baptists' letters will receive priority when space is limited.)

Letters must be limited to 250 words. All correspondence is subject to editing.

Correspondents should refrain from personal attacks. The opinions expressed in letters to the editor do not necessarily reflect the views of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board.

No more than one letter from any individual will be printed during a three-month period.

When in the judgement of the editor a given issue has received sufficient attention, correspondence dealing with it will no longer be published and a notice will be printed to that effect.

PREACH FORGIVENESS

Editor:

I would like to submit a short rebuttal to the article about the church being burned in Georgia. I can understand the overwhelming belief that someone who has committed a crime should be punished. However, as Christians we have the responsibility to live what we preach — forgiveness.

It is my belief that by posting a \$10,000 reward for the arrest of the person or persons involved, it is not in the best interest of Baptists or Christians in general to show this kind of unforgiveness. Jesus gave his life on the cross so that we would be forgiven of our sins. Surely we as his followers can find the forgiveness in our hearts to overlook the ramblings of a firebug.

I agree that in one respect the culprit should be brought to justice, but not with the church or its congregation as the instrument. "Vengeance is mine" sayeth the Lord, "I shall repay." Perhaps you could pass this along to the church involved. It certainly appears that they need their sights realigned.

Buddy Cooley
Ellisville

PRAISE FOR YOUTH

Editor:

Neely Church youth traveled to Tennessee a few weeks ago to see the Passion Play, which details the life of Jesus Christ. They brought back great news.

The first night they were there one youth was saved after a devotional!

Three days later on the way home after another devotional, two youth were saved! When we stopped at Corinth for another devotional and a rest, three youth got saved!

Also at that stop two rededicated their lives to God and four teens and adults quit smoking! We had a wonderful trip!

When we got home and unpacked at the church and talked to our pastor Kenny Adair, another youth got saved.

Our youth leader, Tim Murrah, was overwhelmed with joy! We had found out when we got back one of our youth was saved at a Vacation Bible School meeting at Fredonia Church!

It was the best trip that the church had ever sponsored.

The following Sunday morning we had three more to get saved at church and another joined the church by promise of letter!

A lot of times, you hear all the bad news but today we want you to hear all the good news. The Lord is still blessing us at Neely Church, because working together works.

Don't give up on that person you keep praying for, because miracles happen every day.

Patsy Kidd
New Albany

APPRECIATE CONFERENCES

Editor:

Please allow me to express my appreciation for the youth conferences at Gulfshore Assembly. I'm grateful for the guidance and ministries of Reid

Vance, Frank Simmons, and the faculty and staff.

I deeply appreciate the efforts of Refuge to lead us in worship. Rarely have I found a band with their musical ability and theological understanding of how God wants us to approach him. It was refreshing!

Finally let me say that Michael Kelley was an excellent choice for camp pastor. His love for God and others is easily evident and his ability to communicate the truth of God's Word and encourage others to be disciples was

engaging. I praise God for the way he (God) used all of these things in the lives of our folks that attended camp this summer and for the eternal impact it will have for many others as well.

We are blessed as Mississippi Baptists to have a wonderful facility like Gulfshore Assembly. I could go on but I still couldn't say enough to express my appreciation for all those that make a difference in the Kingdom's work.

Curtis Carter, assoc. pastor
Meadow Grove Church,
Brandon

HOMECOMINGS

Edwards (Metro): 125th year; July 30; 10:30 a.m., followed by covered dish in fellowship hall; Russell M. McIntire, pastor.

Friendship, McComb: July 9;

11 a.m., 1:30 p.m. and covered dish in fellowship hall at noon; Bill Webb, Meridian, guest speaker; Hubert Greer, Wesson, guest singer, and afternoon concert; LaVerne Summerlin, pastor.

VBS DATES AND RESULTS



Thrasher Church, Booneville, held VBS on June 5-9. Average attendance was 122. Sandy Johnson was the director. Kevin Merritt is pastor.



VBS at Providence Church, Grenada County

Wildwood, Clinton: July 10-14; 6:30-8:30 p.m. Call (601) 922-1429 for more information; Bobby Dungan is pastor.

Temple, Myrtle: July 17-21; 6:30 to 9 p.m.

Providence Church, Grenada County, had 25 children enrolled in VBS with two professions of faith. Bertha Blakely was the director and Harvey Springer is pastor.

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PART-TIME YOUTH MINISTER NEEDED. Send resume to: Providence Baptist Church, c/o Dicky Taylor, 301 Fayette Davis Avenue, Cleveland, MS 38732.

PART TIME MINISTER OF MUSIC AND PIANIST needed. Richburg Baptist Church, Hattiesburg, MS. Send resume to Music Search Committee, 309 Sandy Run Road, Hattiesburg, MS 39402.

PIANIST NEEDED at Kreole Avenue Baptist Church, Moss Point. Call 228-475-1306.

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THANKS, MISS. BAPTISTS

Editor:

We are International Mission Board missionaries who have just returned to the field after completing our first stateside assignment. We would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to Mississippi Baptists for the love and care you have given us during our time in the states.

We appreciate your interest in missions and the various means of support we receive from you. We thank each and every church who allowed us to share our story and who are praying for us. We would particularly like to say thank you for the provisions of a home and a car.

First, we say thanks to Arlington Heights Church in Pascagoula, for the home they provide for missionaries and for allowing us to stay there. We appreciate them taking such good care of us.

Secondly, we would like to say thanks to the Macedonian Call Foundation for furnishing us with dependable transportation. Thank you, Mississippi Baptists, for the support you give to this foundation. It meets a tremendous need in the lives of missionaries and has been such a blessing to us.

We also want to thank Tom and Jane Hearon for the endless hours you have given to serve us through this foundation.

We love you, Mississippi Baptists. You are a blessing to us.
Tim and Jan Webb
Toluca, Mexico

DANGEROUSLY CLOSE?

Editor:

All of the people in the world — not just Baptists — are aware of the action just taken at the Southern Baptist Convention on June 13, disapproving women being pastors. I submit some thoughts contrary to that sad decision.

First, the word "pastors" is only found in the New Testament one time in the King James Version — Eph. 4:11. Elsewhere the same word appears, but it is always translated "shepherds" when used in other New Testament places. Note the position of "authority" of such pastors: lower than that of apostles, prophets, evangelists. So, when we read in Acts 2 of women serving as preachers, and Acts 21:9 of Philip having four daughters

who served as prophets, we are to recognize that their authority is on a level at least equal to the "pastors" listed in Eph. 4:11. I disagree with the pastors who drew up this stifling motion to exclude women from a pastoral type of ministry.

Unfortunately, we have not heard the last of this convention blunder for now. Seminary professors and denominational employees, for examples, will be forced to sign the decision made in Orlando or be forced out of their positions.

My perception is that the spirit of service that would carry out the example of Jesus will just as likely be found among our female church members, as among some of the male pastors whom I have known. Finally, are we getting dangerously close to blasphemy and presumptuousness when we dictate to God whom he should use in his service?

Jerry Vardaman
Starkville

STOP MISUSING NAME

Editor:

It has been a difficult few weeks to read the newspaper. Being both a Christian and a Baptist, I have looked on in dismay as the leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) has taken yet another step to isolate and alienate some groups.

Now Southern Baptists, whose leadership and voting is controlled by a small group of fundamentalists with a large following, have voted to encourage churches to reject female pastors. Barring half of the human creation from the pulpit robs us of a perspective and understanding without which the church cannot survive. I say "survive," because when the church becomes another exclusive men's organization, it is no longer a church at all.

Sadly, the damage done by Southern Baptist power brokers stretches beyond the confines of the convention. When a religious group as large as the SBC sows division, the entire body of faith reaps the damage.

For these reasons, I'm calling for this glorified boys' club to discontinue their misuse of the Baptist name. Historical Baptists would be unrecognizable to the current SBC leaders. Real Baptists have fought for things like freedom of conscience, religious liberty, and church autonomy. These

concepts are lost on an organization whose leaders are determined to press their agenda until all its members look the same.

Mad, sad, and feeling near helpless, I'm going to sign off with the sincere hope that more and more Baptists refuse to let the SBC speak for them.

Brandon Jones
Pascagoula

GO ALL THE WAY

Editor:

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) has drawn up a statement of belief advocating that women should no longer be permitted to serve as pastors in Southern Baptist churches.

Aside from the fact that many churches will simply ignore such a statement, please note that the SBC proposal was not drafted by God.

We are dogmatically told that "the office of pastor" is limited to men as qualified by Scripture. What "office of pastor?" There was no distinct "office of pastor" in Paul's day.

The favorite proof text for this theological tinkering is probably 1 Tim. 2:9-14, an old standby when it comes to discriminating against women — who do most of the work and without whom most, if not all, of our church doors will close. Tell me, is this pronouncement ex-cathedra?

Nothing in the New Testament is clear on this matter, along with many other matters. For example Gal. 3:28 settles the issue in another direction, clearly abolishing all sexual distinctions.

If my Baptist brothers in Nashville are really serious about this, why not be consistent? Go all the way and propose that only men can talk in church based on 1 Cor. 14:34-35? They have as much authority for this restriction as the former. I dare them.

Charles R. Moulder
Hattiesburg

WHAT'S NEXT?

Editor:

I read with interest the issue of June 1. In that issue were two separate reports: the prohibition of divorced persons serving as missionaries of the North American Mission Board (NAMB), and the fact that First Church, Atlanta, will now have a divorcee as pastor. There seems to be some inconsistency there.

It seems that it is now wrong for a divorced person to serve as a missionary with the NAMB, yet it is fine for a divorcee to serve as pastor of one of the larger-congregation churches of the Southern Baptist Convention, even

though that same divorcee had promised his resignation should he become divorced, but then changed his mind and did not make good on that promise.

What does that make of the original promise?

I realize that NAMB and the local church are not like entities, the local church being its own highest authority and NAMB subject to the regulations imposed by higher authority — but sin is still sin, be it divorce or not being absolutely truthful to the congregation which you serve.

Seems to me we need to get this thing of divorce and being unfaithful to your word straightened out! Now, just which is the greater, unforgivable sin?

What's next? Standards imposed by higher authority as to who may and who may not serve as pastor of an autonomous church? Could be!

Robert M. Moore Sr.
Morgan City

FINAL ANSWER?

Editor:

I would like to respond to the recent tightening of the North American Mission Board (NAMB) policy regarding the ability of divorced men to serve as chaplains. NAMB trustee Kelly Burris was quoted (in the Louisiana Baptist Message) as saying the agency needs to, "apply biblical principles consistently to missionaries and chaplains alike." He also stated, "We all have our own opinions," about how those principles should be applied. It seems that their opinions may have been substituted for some biblical principles.

Where does it say in the Bible that a person who has been divorced is excluded from serving in a pastoral role? If we try to answer the question with the commonly used scripture reference, 1 Tim. 3:2, which states in most translations that the overseer (pastor, bishop) is to be the husband of "one wife," we have several more question which must be dealt with immediately.

For example, if Paul was writing about divorce, why didn't he use the Greek word for divorce? He must have known the Greek word for divorce because he used it in every other instance in which he talked about the subject.

My question to the NAMB trustees is, "Is this your final answer?" I would like to know before I stand in the pulpit next Sunday and ask people to surrender their lives to the Lord Jesus Christ and his work.

Should I check their marriage record before I pray for them?

Jimmy Kettleman Jr.
Holly Bluff



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Jesus Christ

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of Your Presence
in Heaven!

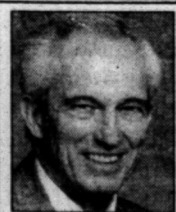
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1. Lord, I admit that I need you.
(*I have sinned.*)
2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death.
(*I repent.*)
3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you.
(*I believe in Jesus.*)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with him.
(*I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.*)

But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name (John 1:12).

If you make a decision for Jesus Christ today, contact a local Baptist church for spiritual guidance.



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Reminder

The Baptist Record will
not publish on July 6.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Judgment on the unrepentant

Revelation 8:2-3, 13; 9:1-4, 11, 20-21

By Tommy Bufkin

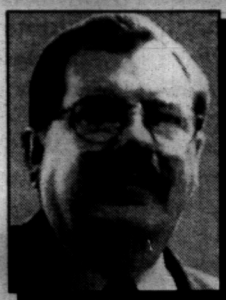
Who defends the righteous? It has been said that more Christians will be martyred this century than all previous centuries combined. It is estimated that 425 Christians will be martyred today (International Christian Concern). Why does God not do something? Where is justice? God will balance the scales one day. His wrath will be poured out on all unbelievers.

Answers to prayers (8:2-3). The opening of the seventh seal ushers in the judgment that God will bring against those who oppose him. These judgments are expressed by the seven trumpets, all of which precede the return of Christ. These are

words of encouragement to the faithful that justice will prevail. It is also a grim warning to the unbeliever.

A special group of seven angels receives seven trumpets. Trumpets have an important place in scripture. They are sounded to get man's attention for God.

Earlier (6:10) the saints had prayed to God for justice. Their prayers seem to go unanswered but they are not. The prayers of believers are never ignored. Incense was burned in the temple to symbolize the prayers of God's people rising to him. Here a separate angel from the seven offers this incense with the prayers of the faithful. Their



Bufkin

prayers for justice and vindication are to be answered.

Call to repentance (8:13; 9:1-4, 11). God's judgments get progressively worse but the last three are to be worse still. An angel or eagle (the best manuscripts have "eagle") warns all the earth. This is in contrast to the church. It seems to be a warning and a call to repentance (9:20). The wrath of God is redemptive. He seeks to turn man from evil to righteousness.

At the sound of the fifth trumpet, a star falls from heaven. This star is referred to as "he." This one (whether Satan, another fallen angel, or someone else) is given the means to release demonic forces of evil from their place of imprisonment. They are allowed power to execute God's judgment.

John calls this demonic hoard "locusts" but they do not look

like the locusts he knew. Perhaps he calls them locusts because they came in a dark ominous cloud like swarms of locusts. Described later in the chapter they are fearsome beasts armored, winged, and equipped with terrible stings on their tails.

God is still in control. The locusts may not harm vegetation or God's people. They are only to punish the unbeliever and that is to be limited in time to five months.

Some believe that the identifying mark on the forehead of the believers is a literal, visible mark. Whether literal or not, believers are marked with the sign of divine ownership and are safe from demonic powers.

God's wrath against the unbeliever is to turn from sin to repentance. As believers present the message of the Gospel, they need to warn of the judgment that comes on the unrepentant.

Refusal to repent (9:20-21). The sad thing is that even the terrible judgment of God does

not turn the wicked from their ways. Men continue to worship gods of their own making. There seems to be two types of false worship indicated here: the worship of evil spirits and the worship of idols. Idolatry is presented as especially foolish because it is the worship of things which cannot communicate or act.

Whatever you worship sets the course of your life. This false worship led to sinful acts of which they would not repent. Four are identified: murder, sorcery, sexual immorality, and stealing. Sorceries include many things like magic, drug use, fortune telling, incantations, and such things.

God seeks by his love and by his judgment to turn man from sin to himself. Some respond but some harden their hearts and refuse to repent. All need to hear God's message of mercy and his warning of judgment to come.

Bufkin is pastor of Mt. Zion Church, Rankin Association.

FAMILY BIBLE SERIES

Provisions for believers: Salvation

Ephesians 1:1-23

By Juanita West

Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus divides into two major sections: doctrine and the believer's response. This epistle is one of the prison letters, which Paul evidently penned while imprisoned in Rome. Again Paul demonstrates his total commitment to his apostleship because of his greater concern for helping the believers than his concern for his own personal safety.

Chosen by the Father (vv. 1-6). The letter begins with the customary salutation (vv. 1-2) and blessing. The blessing reminds the believers of the spiritual blessings that they

receive because they are in Christ (v. 3). We are blessed because "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world" (v. 4, NKJ). Warren W. Wiersbe states, "God chose us even before he created the universe, so that our salvation is wholly of his grace and not on the basis of anything we ourselves have done. He chose us in Christ, not in ourselves. And he chose us for a purpose: to be holy and without blame" (Be Rich, 1986, p.18).

Parents of adopted children explain to them how special they are because they were chosen. These parents predetermined their desire for children, so they



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chose to adopt a child into their family. As a comparison of much greater proportion, God has predestined all believers, regardless of age, to be adopted "as sons by Jesus Christ to himself..." (v. 5, NKJ). According to Wiersbe, "The events connected with the crucifixion of

Christ were predestined (Acts 4: 25-28), God has predestined our adoption (Eph. 1:5) as well as our future inheritance (Eph. 1:11)" (Be Rich, p.19).

Redeemed through the Son (vv. 7-10). Paul reminds the Ephesian Christians that they have been redeemed or purchased, and set free by the shed blood of Christ. By this act, Jesus has taken their sins away and carried them to the cross. "Christ through his death bought us from our slavery to sin. Through the blood of Christ, we receive our redemption" (v. 7, notes, NKJ).

David C. George wrote that redemption is God's free gift to man, and he has the riches, or the spiritual resources, to give such a great gift (Layman's Bible Book Commentary, 1979, p. 100). By his grace, God reveals to the believers the hidden truth or mystery of his will (v. 9). "This mystery is God's good pleasure to purpose in Christ to bring all things in heaven and on earth under his headship in the consummation of time" (The Bible Knowledge Commentary, p. 618). In Christ, we are all a part of God's "arrangement of history to fulfill his plan of salvation" (v. 10, notes, NKJ).

Fanny Crosby had great insight into God's mystery when she penned these marvelous words of truth: "Redeemed how I love to proclaim it! Redeemed by the blood of the lamb; redeemed through his infinite mercy, his child and forever I am!"

Sealed with the Spirit (vv. 11-14). A proper seal is important for

canned vegetables or products purchased at the grocery store. The seal is a guarantee of a product's freshness or worth. As Christians, our lives are also sealed. Our faith and belief in God through the shed blood of Jesus has been properly sealed by the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The believer belongs to God, has been sealed forever, and nothing can break the seal.

In verse 14, Paul refers to the Holy Spirit as a "guarantee" (NKJ) or a "pledge of our inheritance" (NAS). "The Holy Spirit is God's first installment to guarantee to his children that he will finish his work and eventually bring them to glory" (Wiersbe, p. 24). Through all of this, God's people will see his work and "praise his glory" (v. 14, NKJ).

Wiersbe states: "What began in eternity past was fulfilled in time present and will continue for all eternity!" (Be Rich, p. 18)

West is a member of Calvary Church, Newton.

LIFE AND WORK

God's highest creation

Gen. 1:27; 2:7; Ps. 145:8-9, 17-19; Rom. 5:8-10; Ecc. 12:13; Matt. 22:34-40

By Matt Loving

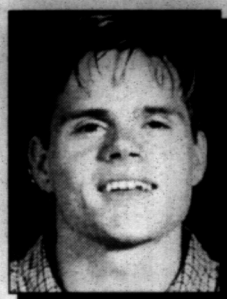
What is so significant about being human? We are significant because God loves us, designed us, and provided redemption for us, thus, giving all people a purpose.

Unfortunately we live in a moral climate that either overemphasizes humanity's importance or has a callous disregard for life. As Christians, we are to recognize that God created humans in his own image and we are to live a life that reflects that he has endowed people with value and significance.

This lesson focuses on the

biblical truth that the significance of individuals is found in their being in the image of God by creation and by being redeemed into a right relationship with God by faith in Christ.

God designed us (Gen. 1:27; 2:7). These passages reveal that God made humans out of the dust of the ground and used his own breath to give them life. He formed us in his own image. We need to understand that being made in his image involves, among other things, being rational and moral. The fact of how God created us can also help us to see that his design involved a



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physical nature (made of dust) and a spiritual nature (having God's breath).

God loves us (Ps. 145:8-9, 17-19). God acts with love and compassion toward humanity because they are a part of what he created. More specifically, he created humanity to have an intimate relationship with him.

Our significance is found in our understanding that he loves us and choosing to love him in return. God's graciousness is evidenced in the truth that he gives us the choice to love him. Max Lucado wrote that "within the man, God had placed a divine seed... and the One who had chosen to love had created one who could love in return. Now it's our choice" (In The Eye Of The Storm, p. 243).

God provides redemption for us (Rom. 5:8-10). Our worth to God was fully revealed to us in Jesus' life, death on the cross,

and resurrection. Although the sinful nature and the stain of sin is with us in this world, Jesus opened the way for sinful people to be made right with God by placing their faith in him for forgiveness and restoration of a love relationship with the heavenly father. Christians need to learn that they discover their true significance only in Jesus and share that fact with those who don't know him.

God gives us purpose (Ecc. 12:13; Matt. 22:34-40). These two passages wonderfully sum up our purpose for life as designed by God. The teacher of Ecclesiastes states that human beings are to revere and obey God. Jesus, in turn, similarly replied to a group of Pharisees by explaining that God's overall requirements for humanity as revealed in all of scripture is to love God with your whole being and to love your neighbor as yourself. This purpose statement of Jesus for us is another aspect of how we

know we are significant to God.

God created us with the intention that we walk forever in a love relationship with him and live according to the directives in his Word so that others would be drawn unto him. All people will come face to face with him, whether it is experientially by faith in Christ, or in the day of judgment.

One way of understanding that our purpose is in God is evidenced in C.S. Lewis' words when he wrote "you cannot put Him off with speculations about your next door neighbors or memories of what you have read in books. What will all that chatter and hearsay count (will you even be able to remember it?) when all the anaesthetic fog which we call 'nature' or 'the real world' fades away and the Presence in which you have always stood becomes palpable, immediate, and unavoidable?" (Mere Christianity, p. 184).

Loving is minister of youth at Oak Hill Church, Poplarville.

LIFE AND WORK

Humanity's greatest failure

Gen. 3:1-6, 16-19; Rom. 5:12-14, 18-19

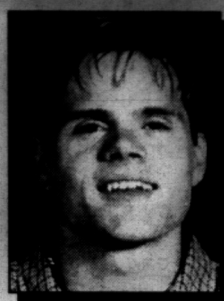
By Matt Loving

What's the big deal about sin? When human beings rebelled against God, sin entered the world resulting in condemnation, alienation, enslavement, depravity, and death for mankind. Many ascribe to the belief that if they just live a good life God will let them into heaven. Christianity recognizes that all humans fail God's standard, are guilty of sin, and stand in need of God's forgiveness through faith in Christ. This lesson will help us to address four aspects of the nature and consequences of sin.

Sin is rebellion (Gen. 3:1-6). Adam and Eve's actions of deliberate disobedience to God

in this passage reveal the nature of sin and how we get enticed into it. The devil will always tempt us to rationalize away what we might miss out on if we don't sin. What the devil cannot do, however, is show us what the results will be for disobeying God. Sin can be understood in the following four different ways: transgression – the breaking of God's law; rebellion – refusal to live obediently to God; perversion – taking a truth of God and twisting it for personal pleasure; and iniquity – social wrongdoing.

Sin has consequences (Gen. 3:16-19). This passage clearly reveals the seriousness of dis-



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obedience to God not only individually but for all people. After God confronted Adam and Eve, the consequences of pain in childbirth, painful work in order to get food, and death were issued. In their plight we can see that sin not only affects our personal relationship with God and others, but it also has cosmic consequences. Sin is the reason we live in a world that doesn't work the way God designed it.

Sin is universal (Rom. 5:12-14). Paul states in this passage that sin entered the world through the disobedience and rebellion of Adam. With sin came the consequence – death. Death reigns over all people; therefore sin is a fact of life. The focus of this point is that sin is universal and that all people have sinned. Evidences that people sin can be found in everyone's consciousness of

guilt and that sacrifice for wrongdoing is a part of almost all of the world's false religions.

Sin can be forgiven (Rom. 5:18-19). The universal stain of an inherited tendency to sin and the choice to sin is not the end of the story. Jesus' life, death on the cross, and resurrection provides victory over sin and death, thus restoring us to the original state in which God designed for us to live. All people have the opportunity to be made righteous by placing their faith in Christ alone to be their Savior and their Lord.

How would you define sin to a person who knows nothing about the Bible? One very basic approach is to use the analogy of sin being a cancer or fatal illness.

Many times our physical bodies are giving us signals that something is wrong. We may ignore it because we are too proud or we are not sure for what to ask help.

The deep dissatisfaction that

we experience in life with the temporal pleasures is a gift from God. This deep need for something more is one of the Great Physician's ways of telling us our eternal being needs his healing touch.

The disease that is disfiguring our view of God, and one another, is called sin. Evidences are recorded in the Bible in people's lives such as Noah, Jonah, John, and Peter. The ripple effect of sinful choices can also be understood within relationships and by observing the interactions of the world around us.

After sharing these scenarios, you can then share with the person out of the book of Romans. In it we find that all men are without excuse in knowing that they need God. Later in Romans we also find that Jesus is presented as the only way to be restored to our intended mode of existence.

Loving is minister of youth at Oak Hill Church, Poplarville.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Encouragement to faithful witnesses

Revelation 10:10-11; 11:1-3, 7-8, 11, 15-18

By Tommy Bufkin

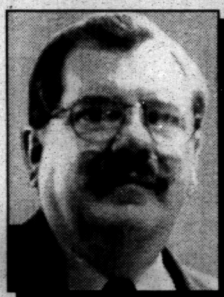
On a warm summer night a little boy came running in from the yard holding a lightning bug tightly in his hands. "Daddy, Daddy," he said, "why do these bugs light up?" Before his dad could answer, he opened his hand where the bug lay smashed. "I know, I know," he shouted, "because he has that stuff in him."

The true witness has the "stuff" in him. He has experienced the saving grace of God in Christ. It has gripped his soul and is evidenced by a life and words that point people to Christ.

Believer's assignment (10:10-11; 11:1-3). A mighty angel came

with God's message. He had a little book or scroll in his hand. Seven thunders are heard which apparently contained the full counsel of God. They were more than man has capacity to understand and John was told not to write them down. It was the mystery of God. By contrast the small book was to be taken by the author. It was part of the counsel of God, a message John was to tell.

John was told to eat the book to indicate the need to completely assimilate the message. It was to become part of him so that the message and messenger could be separated. A person's witness must come from the



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transformed person they have become.

The message of God is bittersweet; it is a two-edged sword. It contains both the mercies and the judgments of God. The Gospel is sweet to those who respond and have their lives changed, but it is bitter to those who reject it and face God's wrath.

John took an active part as he was told to measure the Temple. Some take this literally and believe that the Temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem. Others take it as symbolically representing the church. Measuring is for the purpose of preservation. There seems to be a distinction between the true people of God and those on the outside. They will be preserved during this time of struggle.

Two witnesses are introduced but nothing is said of who they are or from where they came. Some have identified them as

Moses and Elijah because they were expected by the Jews to appear before the end times. God's witnesses are empowered to proclaim his message.

God's message is to all the world. Every believer has the responsibility to publish that message.

Witnesses' suffering (11:7-8). The emphasis is on God's control. The witnesses finish what they were to do. Only then are they overcome. They are overcome by the "beast." He is the embodiment of the anti-Christian forces of the world. John, in his first two epistles, calls this opposing force "antichrist." This power is great – destroying the witness but the victory is short lived.

The great city is Jerusalem but points to all of mankind. It is spiritually Sodom and Egypt. Sodom was always a symbol for wickedness and immorality and Egypt of materialism and oppression. God's witness appears dead and subject to ridicule.

No matter the opposition, God's people must be faithful in their witness. They will prevail.

Message's endurance (11:11). The witnesses are resurrected. "The breath of life from God" indicates that God's spirit will bring life to his witnesses. Those rejecting the message and rejoicing over the death of the witness will be forced to see the power of God.

The believer should be faithful in their witness. God's message cannot be defeated by the forces of this world.

Witnesses' reward (11:15-18). Finally the seventh trumpet sounds. There had been silence. Now there were voices. They proclaim the ultimate triumph of Christ and his Kingdom over all.

God, the Eternal One, is acknowledged as the source of victory. All will be judged, the living and the dead. Those who acknowledge God will be rewarded.

Bufkin is pastor of Mt. Zion Church, Rankin Association.

FAMILY BIBLE SERIES

Provisions for believers: new relationships

Ephesians 2:1-22

By Juanita West

After the doctrinal summary in the first chapter of Ephesians, Paul began a look at the Christian response to doctrinal principles. He reminded the Ephesian Christians that they were once "dead in trespasses and sins" (v. 1, NKJ).

Then Paul added his trademark conjunction usage which always draws us to a point of change: "But God because of his great love even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." (vv. 4-6).

Saving faith (vv. 8-10). Verses eight and nine contain a micro-presentation of the

gospel message. Paul returned to the concept of God's grace – the source of all salvation. The culmination of that gift of salvation is Jesus Christ, whose death on the cross provided salvation for all who come to him in faith. Faith, according to the Layman's Bible Commentary, "is man's willingness to let God work in his life" (Vol. 21, p.108).

Paul reiterated that there was nothing that the Ephesians could do to earn their salvation. "Salvation is God's workmanship" (The Bible Knowledge Commentary, p. 624).

God intends for believers to do good works as a result of their faith in God. Good works



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of themselves cannot earn salvation. The gift of salvation is "the gift of God" (v. 8, NKJ).

God has given us works to do that will characterize our Christian lives. "By our works, all shall know us, and glorify Christ" (1 Peter 2:12).

Sorry condition (vv. 11-13). Paul reminded the Ephesian Christians of their original circumstances: "You, once Gentiles in the flesh – who are called uncircumcision – were without Christ having no hope and without God in the world" (vv. 11-12, NKJ).

The Gentiles were in a desperate situation at that time. Yet, through the blood of Jesus, they were brought into the presence of God (v. 13). Paul led them to see that both Jews and Gentiles were sinners but the blood of Christ had brought them into one body.

Shared peace (vv. 14-18). Since the Jewish Christians

believed their faith in God was demonstrated by strict adherence to the religious rules, they were often in conflict with the less strict Gentiles who had no covenant with God.

This difference between the two created a barrier in their relationships which Christ reconciled by his death on the cross when the "believing Jews and Gentiles became Christians" (The Bible Knowledge Commentary, p. 626). Paul wrote that out of this act, Christ created "one new man from the two, thus making peace" (v. 15, NKJ).

The picture of Christ breaking down the "middle wall of separation" (v. 14, NKJ) represents the "spiritual barrier that had separated God from man as well as the barrier that separated Jew from Gentile" (Layman's Commentary, p. 109).

Sacred structures (vv. 19-22). A visitor to any of the great European cathedrals or castles will be awestruck by how stone after stone of such massive

structures could have been placed so perfectly during the pre-mechanical and pre-technological world. The cornerstone, marked in each building, is the success of the building.

In Ephesus, the Gentile Christians understood Paul's analogy to be what Christ had built for them. Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of the building while the apostles and the prophets are the foundation because "they pointed to and witnessed to Jesus" (v. 20, Notes, NKJ).

Together, Jews and Gentiles make up the family of God (v. 19). Christ brought them together into a "holy temple in the Lord," for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (vv. 21-22, NKJ).

In the same way, "The church today is a living, growing temple; and when it is completed, Christ will return and take the temple to glory" (Wiersbe, Expository Outlines of the New Testament, p. 304).

West is a member of Calvary Church, Newton.

Mississippians share Gospel in North Africa

NORTH AFRICA (Special) — Ten American Christians, including eight from Mississippi, spent more than a week prayerwalking through this part of the Last Frontier of missions to reclaim it for Christ.



HELLO! — Jackie Luckie, (right) of Brandon, joins with Hubert Miles (left) of Georgia and Tress Miles of Virginia as they exchange greetings with an English teacher in North Africa. The meeting occurred while the three were prayerwalking through the North African city, asking God to bring the gospel to the people here. (IMB photo)

Their work is part of a program called "Operation Torch," sponsored by Southern Baptist International Mission Board. The idea is to bring more than 1,000 praying Southern Baptists here to help liberate the region for Christ; similar to the military/political liberation American soldiers helped with here in World War II. The only "weapon" the Southern Baptists are using is prayer.

Seven members of Crossgates Church, Brandon, took part: David and Amy

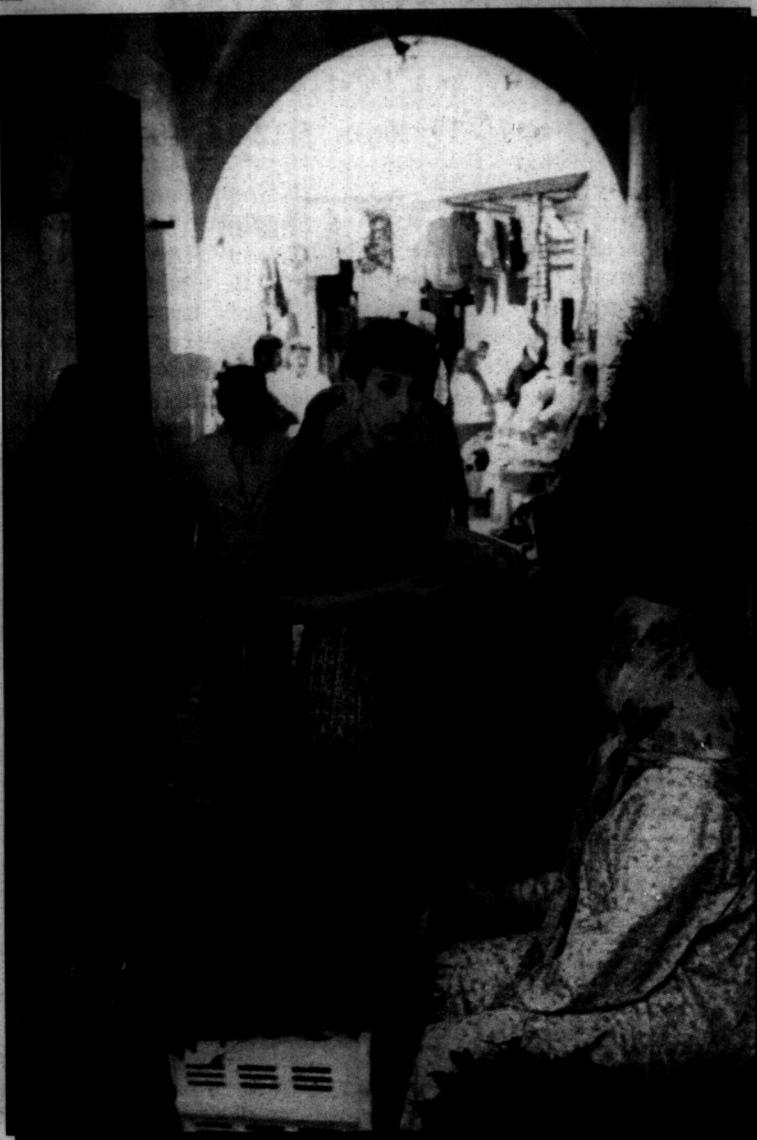
Lancaster, Jackie S. Luckie, Deb Breazeale, Lynn E. Bailey and Jerry B. Roberts, all of Brandon, and Spring Heflin of Pearl.

They were joined by Canton resident Pam Biggs, a member of Jackson Revival Center and a frequent attendee of Crossgates Church with her family, who are members there.

Also on the team were two other Southern Baptists: Hubert C. Miles, 76, of Pulaski, Ga., who served in this area during World War II, and his daughter Tress Miles of Richmond, Va.

The volunteers spent hours praying for places, individuals, and evangelistic efforts in North Africa, though security concerns do not allow specific locations to be publicized. Many national governments in North Africa are controlled or heavily influenced by Islam, the predominant faith group. Christian missionary presence and evangelistic outreach face heavy opposition.

Jackie Luckie could not speak Arabic, but she feels God had them meet an Arabic woman who is an English speaker so they could talk. Luckie, a group leader at Crossgates, said later she thought it was an important contact.



IN THE MARKETPLACE — Jackie Luckie of Brandon

shares a warm smile with a woman selling mint in a North African market. Luckie, a member of Crossgates Church, African Brandon, was prayerwalking during a 10-day trip with people seven other Mississippi Baptists, plus a Baptist man from they met Georgia and a Baptist woman from Virginia. The team was did not taking part in the International Mission Board's "Operation seem very Torch" program which will bring more than 1,000 volun- interested teers to North Africa to pray on-site for the region to be in spiritual reached for Christ. (IMB photo)

matters, Muslim or otherwise, said Lynn Bailey, who has served on other missions trips to Central and South America and the Philippines. Pam Biggs agreed. "The (Muslim) call to prayer was completely ignored," she said.

"This opportunity has opened the eyes and hearts of many in our local area back home and we are claiming this area of the world through our Lord Jesus Christ. Lots of prayer is needed!" said Deb Breazeale, who is a choir member and share leader at Crossgates Church. The people she met were surprised to see Americans, because most visitors here come from Europe, she said.

"The most interesting thing on this trip has been the friendly, open smiles on the children's faces," said Spring Heflin.

"I spoke with seventh grade girls today who were very excited

to meet an American. I could have talked for hours and developed a relationship with them," she said.

"I have a burden for the women and the biggest influence I have had is to look into their eyes and to pray for release of oppression. I pray that God will bless and multiply the efforts of the Southern Baptist workers assigned here," said Heflin, who is a mission conference leader at Crossgates. She feels North Africa is "more open than they have ever been to Christian influence."

"I feel humbled and privileged to be able to serve the Lord in this place. The needs are so great here. These people have no joy and they are so lost. My heart aches for them," said Jerry Roberts, a Sunday School teacher at Crossgates Church.

"I know the Lord is going to open doors and do some miraculous things here," he added.

Other teams of Southern Baptists will be visiting North Africa in coming months. Southern Baptists or church leaders who want more information on Operation Torch and liberating North Africa may contact Lannie Wilbourn by e-mail at lwilbourn@aol.com, or Gerry Volkart at the Southern Baptist International Mission Board in Richmond, Va., by calling toll-free (800) 999-3113. Also, more information is on the Operation Torch website at www.optorch.com.

Editor's note: The locations described in this article are unnamed at the request of Christian ministries working in those areas.

Bibliocipher

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CS ECKE CKEC KX SKU,
DSE CVY CSKU ICKE ECS
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TCPUTCSH; CS ECKE
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USOSDKEVLX EIL: SDSOSX

Clue: C = H

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: First Timothy Four: One.



MAKING FRIENDS — Jerry Roberts (left), Lynn Bailey (center) and Spring Heflin, all members of Crossgates Church, Brandon, talk with a merchant during a prayerwalking trip to North Africa during May. The three were taking part in the International Mission Board's program, Operation Torch, in which more than 1,000 Southern Baptists will come to the region to pray that the gospel can be received and new churches started. (IMB photo)